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## Dialectal Variation and Spanish Language Teaching (SLT): Perspectives from the United Kingdom

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Title: Dialectal Variation and Spanish Language Teaching (SLT):  
Perspectives from the United Kingdom

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# **Dialectal Variation and Spanish Language Teaching (SLT): Perspectives from the United Kingdom**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents the results of an empirical investigation into the teaching practices and opinions of UK-based Spanish teachers concerning the treatment of language varieties in the L2/FL classroom. Qualitative and quantitative data obtained through an online survey provide the basis for an analysis of participants' knowledge of dialectal varieties and how to teach them, their perceptions of their own and other varieties, and the extent to which they accept new Pan-Hispanic ideologies and the conception of Spanish as a pluricentric language. The study reveals a lack of correlation between teachers' declared knowledge about Spanish dialectal varieties and their own teaching practices.

## **KEYWORDS**

Spanish Language Teaching (SLT); dialectal varieties; teaching practices; linguistic ideologies

## **RESUMEN**

Este artículo presenta los resultados de una investigación empírica sobre las opiniones y prácticas docentes relativas al tratamiento de las variedades lingüísticas en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera (ELE) por parte de los docentes en el Reino Unido. A partir de datos cualitativos y cuantitativos obtenidos mediante un cuestionario en línea, se analizan sus conocimientos sobre las variedades diatópicas y su enseñanza, su percepción acerca de su propia variedad y las demás, así como y el grado de aceptación, por parte de este colectivo, de las nuevas ideologías panhispánicas y la concepción pluricéntrica del español. Las conclusiones del estudio revelan que existe una falta de correspondencia entre lo que los profesores declaran saber acerca de las variedades diatópicas del español y sus prácticas docentes.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera (ELE); variedades diatópicas; prácticas docentes; ideologías lingüísticas

## **1. Introduction**

One of the most complex tasks facing any teacher of Spanish as a second (L2) or foreign language (FL) is determining which language model they should teach learners. They must also decide upon which of the most characteristic linguistic features of the multiple varieties of Spanish to present in the classroom. The degree to which teachers take on board the concept of Spanish as a pluricentric language and the Pan-Hispanic language policy promoted at the end of the twentieth century by the Real Academia Española (RAE) and the Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española (ASALE) can be decisive in shaping the way dialectal varieties are treated in the L2/FL classroom. The knowledge and subsequent acceptance or rejection of these new ideologies can affect teachers' practice and, as a result, the content delivered and the methodology employed in the classroom.

In the European context, dialectal varieties are mentioned in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) as the part of sociolinguistic competence, which encompasses the skills necessary to address the social dimension of language use including, among other elements, "dialect and accent" (Council of Europe 2018, 137). For its part, the Instituto Cervantes Curricular Plan (Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes, PCIC) (Instituto Cervantes 2007) takes the cultivated (i.e., refined and educated) norm of north-central Peninsular Spanish as its preferred dialect when it comes to selecting language resources. This choice is partly based on its association with other educated norms in Hispanic culture and on its prestige. Nevertheless, despite opting for a specific language model, emphasis is placed on the pluricentric nature of Spanish in normative terms and on the need to incorporate linguistic features of other cultivated varieties of Spanish. The PCIC also makes reference to the linguistic

variety spoken by the teacher who “must make sure her own language traits are explained and understood by the learner”<sup>1</sup> (Instituto Cervantes 2007, 60). The use of authentic material is recommended for presenting the different linguistic features of dialectal varieties. In particular, the treatment of dialectal varieties in the Spanish L2/FL classroom is seen to be governed by three main factors (Moreno Fernández 2010, 173): where teaching staff come from, who is authoring teaching materials, and the students’ needs and expectations.

There are multiple contexts in which the teaching and learning of Spanish can take place. The decisions made by practitioners in the teaching-learning process are contextually bound and interrelated (e.g. teacher and student profiles, formal versus non-formal education, immersion or non-immersion methods, etc.), which make each moment comparatively different. As a consequence, the decisions that teachers are required to make with regards to the introduction of Spanish dialectal diversity into the classroom are equally contingent on such factors.

Against this background, the present study assesses the opinions and practices of UK language teachers working in a non-immersion context, based on empirical exploratory research. Our analysis has been carried out taking into account the dialectal varieties of the teacher-participants themselves, alongside the new Pan-Hispanic and pluricentric ideologies, with the aim of determining the extent to which teachers have accepted these ideas. Furthermore, the factors affecting teachers’ choices about the treatment of dialectal varieties are described. Ultimately, the study seeks to shed light on whether a particular teaching model predominates in the L2/FL Spanish classroom or whether, on the contrary, there is a lack of correspondence between theoretical precepts and actual teaching practice. Specifically, we aim to answer the following questions:

1. What training are L2/FL Spanish teachers given about dialectal varieties of Spanish?
2. What is their perception of their own dialectal variety?
3. Which teaching practices are preferred in the teaching of Spanish dialectal varieties?
4. What are some of the advantages and challenges of teaching dialectal diversity in the L2/FL Spanish classroom?

In addition to attempting to answer these questions, we consider one further variable: the distinction between native and non-native teachers. Although this is seen to be less and less important in terms of the profile of L2 teachers (Kramsch and Lihua 2018), we include it here in order to assess whether being a native speaker of Spanish, or not, makes any significant difference to the language models presented in the classroom.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

### ***2.1. Spanish teaching in the UK***

The teaching of foreign languages in the UK is compulsory at certain stages in primary and secondary school education, although the age up to which languages must be studied has been lowered in secondary school. However, it seems this measure has had little impact on the teaching and learning of Spanish, which has experienced a growth in demand. Spanish is the second most studied language after French and now lies ahead of German, which traditionally occupied second place (Instituto Cervantes 2016, 432-441; Consejería de Educación en el Reino Unido e Irlanda 2018, 69-101; Instituto Cervantes 2018, 20-22). It is estimated that by 2020 it will top the list (Tinsley and Doležal 2018). In addition to the presence of Spanish in many school curricula as an optional or compulsory subject, a number of Spanish Sections (6 in Primary Schools and 1 in a Secondary School), which teach subjects in primary and secondary

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<sup>1</sup> Literal quotes from sources in Spanish have been translated by the authors.

schools through the medium of Spanish, have been established in the UK (Instituto Cervantes 2016, 441).

As far as higher education in the UK is concerned, it is worth noting that there are two ways Spanish can be learned. The first is through university degree programmes (generally in combination with other languages or with related subjects as part of a combined degree). According to Álvarez et al. (2018), at least 68 British universities offer Spanish. The second way is for students on any degree programme, and sometimes also postgraduate students and members of the general public, to study Spanish in university language centres. According to Morley, Campbell and Medeiros (2018), Spanish is the most popular choice in the 56 language centres where it is known to be taught.

Regarding the non-formal teaching of Spanish, it should be noted that the Instituto Cervantes operates three centres in England (London, Manchester and Leeds) which, according to the most recently published figures, had a total of 4,340 students enrolled during the academic year 2016-17 (Instituto Cervantes 2018, 11). No data is available for language schools or for the number of students, mainly heritage speakers, studying Spanish in extracurricular ALCE classes (these are run by the Agrupación de Lengua y Cultura Española, the Association of Spanish Language and Culture). However, based on conservative figures, it is estimated that the total number of Spanish learners in the UK is 519,660 (Instituto Cervantes 2018, 11).

The profile of staff teaching Spanish in British classrooms and the training they have received varies according to the educational level at which they are employed. Language teachers in primary schools do not have to be specialists, although some specific training programmes do exist. In secondary schools, many teachers teach more than one language or, indeed, another subject. Within universities, the most striking feature is the disparity in teachers' working conditions; in academic departments around 80% of language staff are employed on full-time contracts, while this is the case for only 20% of those working in university language centres (Álvarez et al. 2018, 7). For its part, the Instituto Cervantes employed a total of 83 teachers in the academic year 2015-16, although only 10 of these were classed as civil servants, benefitting from permanent full-time positions (Instituto Cervantes 2016, 440-441).

## ***2.2 Dialects, language attitudes and opinions***

The concept of *language attitude* is common in fields such as perceptual dialectology, sociolinguistics (especially the cognitive branch) and in linguistic ideologies. Traditionally, three factors have been identified as constituting language attitudes (Hernández-Campoy 2004, 30): cognitive (knowledge), affective (feelings) and conative (the capacity to act). It is important to emphasise, as Hernández-Campoy (2004, 30) points out, that this notion differs from the concept of *opinion*, "which can be defined as a manifest (verbalisable) belief without affective reaction" and from *ideology*, "which can be a global attitude". However, in the case of Spanish L2/FL teachers, it is sometimes difficult to make a distinction between opinions and attitudes, given that in certain cases their attitudes and beliefs as speakers interfere or become muddled with their opinions as specialists. This is due in large part to the highly heterogeneous profile which characterises this group (Muñoz-Basols, Rodríguez-Lifante, and Cruz-Moya 2017, 12-17; 20-21). In fact, the concept of *attitude* in studies about the teaching of Spanish usually restricts its focus to students only. As a consequence, uncovering the traces of specific linguistic ideologies among our participants means addressing both the attitudes and the opinions that they profess to hold.

According to perceptual dialectology (Preston 2004), folk beliefs about language are reflected in the language attitudes of speakers—and especially in the way they judge linguistic variation—within two parameters: their supposed correctness and aesthetic appeal. These give rise to the *inherent value hypothesis*, according to which some language varieties are considered

more pleasant than others, and the *imposed norm hypothesis* according to which cultural norms dictate the prestige of a variety (in particular, the social status of the users of a language variety) (Giles, 1970). These and other issues come together in what is known as *standard language ideology*, a concept coined by Milroy and Milroy (1985) defined by Lippi-Green (1994, 166) as “a bias towards an abstracted, idealized, homogeneous spoken language which is imposed from above, and which takes as its model the written language.” Therefore, observing whether similar judgements to those expressed in these hypotheses are held by this group of teachers is wholly pertinent; in particular, their attitudes towards their own language varieties, choices about which varieties are taught in the classroom, and the handling of teachers’ own discourse.

### **2.3 L2/FL teachers and geographical variety**

In a teaching-learning environment as heterogeneous as that of Spanish, it is worth ascertaining which models are used by teachers. Moreno Fernández (2007, 79-81) identifies three prototypical possibilities for cultivated language: (i) the centralising Spanish based on Castilian which conforms to the traditional academic educated norm—attractive to teachers, among other reasons, for its (supposed) prestige and established hegemonic presence in the normative work of the RAE up to the 21st century—usually employed in literary texts and contemporary film; (ii) the Spanish of the region geographically closest to the teaching context; (iii) the Spanish that Moreno Fernández (2007) calls *General Spanish* (as opposed to *Standard Spanish*), a Spanish variant that is not regionally marked in terms of its grammar or phonetics and which incorporates the most widely used vocabulary. Needless to say, teachers can switch between these three prototypical possibilities or language models depending on the problems and needs that arise in the course of their work.

A number of scholars have developed theoretical proposals which, to a certain degree, aim to offer alternatives to the above. Moreno Fernández himself (2010) suggests bringing to the teaching of languages a model that combines common usage with whatever specific context meets the needs and interests of the students. However, determining what constitutes *the common*, a *General* or a *Standard Spanish* is a complex and controversial undertaking. Regarding the latter, Moreno Fernández (2010, 31-41) analyses the relationship between the concept *standard* and other related concepts and posits that an approximation of the standard would be a combination of the correct, the cultivated and the general.

Andión Herrero (2008), in turn, proposes a model for teaching Spanish based on *Standard Spanish* (which, for her, comprises the common and the neutral), onto which would be superimposed the normative features of what she calls the *preferred variety* (chosen according to the teaching-learning context) plus a range of the linguistic characteristics drawn from the other varieties, considered *peripheral*.

Other authors offer different approaches: Bravo García (2008) advocates the use of *International* or *Neutral Spanish* as a teaching model given that, in accordance with its definition, it incorporates the common and is a variety used in the media and accepted by most of Spanish-speaking America (although to a lesser extent on the Peninsula). According to Bravo García (2008), this international standard has several advantages, above all commercial ones. For example, it reinforces the identity of the language without giving pre-eminence to any particular country, thereby guaranteeing the absence of national characteristics considered undesirable for product promotion. However, it is also the case that it is a reconstructed variety, which does not correspond to the linguistic model of any specific speech community. Consequently, it possesses an artificiality that may be unattractive to many learners, since there is no correspondence with its use in, for example, spontaneous speech. Jurado Salinas (2017, 56-8) suggests using the Mexican variety as a node language for teaching Spanish in Spanish-speaking America and Beaven (2000) and Beaven and Garrido (2000) describe a model in which Spanish is treated as a *World Language* right from beginner level.

Regarding teaching practices, information about how teachers perceive and treat language variety in the classroom is scarce. Studies are limited to small- or medium-scale investigations which use a range of measurements to evaluate the beliefs and attitudes of Spanish teachers towards linguistic variety in particular teaching contexts. Bugel (2000, 244), for example, examines the adoption of Peninsular Spanish linguistic features by teachers in Spanish-speaking America in order to “teach the most general language possible.” Izquierdo Gil (2000) uses results drawn from a survey of Spanish teachers in the French Languedoc-Roussillon region to propose a teaching model based on Peninsular Spanish, at least for elementary level students. In distance learning university courses, Beaven (2000, 116) notes the existence of “a discrepancy between teachers’ desire to teach other varieties and what they do in practice when teaching Spanish.” Anadón Pérez (2003) highlights the reticence of teachers when it comes to introducing elements of Latin American varieties in the British L2/FL classroom. To conclude, Andión Herrero (2009) highlights interest among teachers to know about variety, albeit detecting certain prejudices via a survey carried out among teachers at the Instituto Cervantes.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Data collection tools and analysis**

The present study is based on a questionnaire composed of thirty questions and divided into four parts: (i) perception and declared knowledge of varieties (Qs. 7-10); (ii) training about varieties (Qs. 12-13); (iii) teaching practices (Qs. 14-22); and (iv) materials and assessment (Qs. 23-28) (please see the complete questionnaire in Fuertes Gutiérrez and Bárkányi 2019). It contains open and closed questions (single response, multiple choice and Likert scale), yielding both quantitative and qualitative data. In preparation, the surveys developed by Licerias, Carballo and Droegue (1994-1995) and Andión and Gil (2013) were used to inform the creation of the instruments used in this research.

Similarly, a number of theoretical postulates were assumed: the classification of varieties draws on the Spanish linguistic areas proposed by Moreno Fernández (2007, 38-50); in cases where the designation of a dialect was judged to lack transparency, examples of the regions where it is spoken were added in parentheses; for conciseness, it was decided to include the Canary Islands variety in Southern Spanish although, to avoid confusion, it appears as an example of this category in the questionnaire; it was also decided to add the Spanish that is spoken in bilingual areas, as well as a category for “Other.” In addition, given the need to use the concept of *Standard Variety* despite its controversial nature, participants were given a definition based on the explanation provided by the RAE (2014: “which serves as type, model, norm, pattern or reference”) and the adjectives common and prestigious were included, given their relevance to the study.

The questionnaire was validated by six professionals—a dialectologist, two specialists in L2/FL teaching with research interests in the teaching of dialectal varieties and three experts in linguistic research methods—and a pilot study was carried out with ten volunteers who conformed to the profiles of potential participants. The survey was then published on the SurveyMonkey platform on March 28, 2017 with Ethics Approval Number HREC/2017/2542/Bárkányi/Open University 1. The publication was announced on virtual platforms and distribution lists directed at Spanish teachers and was open for six months, although the majority of responses were received during the first two. For the purposes of this article, only the results corresponding to the first three parts of the questionnaire are examined.

Regarding the treatment of the data, it should be noted that before embarking on analysis, a number of responses were re-categorised in order to correct errors. For example, one participant had selected “none” in the question concerning which variety she spoke and wrote

“Spanish spoken in Asturias” under “Other”—note she did not write *Asturian*—so her response was reclassified accordingly.

All numerical data obtained are analysed using descriptive statistics techniques, although in some cases inferential statistics are also used in order to compare the attitudes and opinions of the two groups of teachers (native speakers and non-native speakers, subsequently referred to as NS and NNS respectively). As we are dealing with categorical Likert-Type data and the different responses are not added up on a composite scale, we use the chi-square test following the recommendations of Boone and Boone (2012), and, in the case of small sample sizes, employ Fisher’s exact test. When handling the data, the five-point scale used in the questionnaire is maintained, that is to say, the data from more than one category are not merged (for example, “agree” and “completely agree”). In addition, thematic analysis is used for processing qualitative data; this is necessarily theory-driven due to the concrete nature of the questions. However, in the first examination of the data, no categories were predetermined. Therefore, categorisation was carried out by two researchers in an inductive and recursive manner, based on the phases established by Braun and Clarke (2012).

### 3.2. Sample

In the present study we analyse data gathered from teachers working in the United Kingdom ( $n = 67$ ) who teach adults. The most relevant demographic features for this research are the mother tongue and dialectal varieties spoken by respondents. In relation to the first aspect, 80.6% ( $n = 54$ ) of participants are NS and 19.4% ( $n = 13$ ) are NNS—4 are native speakers of Catalan and 9 of English. Of the NS, 22.2% declare themselves as having two or three mother tongues and 77.8% have one mother tongue, while 15.4% of the NNS have more than one mother tongue and 84.6% are monolingual. In relation to the dialectal varieties spoken by our participants, the most common is Northern-Central Peninsular Spanish, which accounts for 40.7% of NS and 38.5% of NNS. This is followed by Peninsular Spanish spoken in bilingual areas (29.6% NS, 23% NNS). The other varieties that NS identify themselves as speaking are Southern Peninsular (20.4%), Rioplatense (3.7%) and one participant uses the Andean variety (1.49%). Concerning the rest of the NNS, 23% speak the Mexican and Central American variety and 7.7% the Caribbean, while 15.4% of the non-native teachers state that they do not speak any specific variety or speak a mixture of several, an opinion not shared by any NS informant. This is the only point related to features of the teachers’ demographic profile where a statistically significant difference is observed in the responses of the two groups ( $\chi^2(7) = 27.96, p < 0.001$ ). It should also be noted that 90.7% of NS teachers speak some variety of Spanish from Spain, a fact which is not surprising given the European context of the study.

Regarding the sex and age of our informants, the data concerning the profile of Spanish teachers are similar to the findings of Muñoz-Basols, Rodríguez Lifante and Cruz Moya (2017): 74.2% of our respondents are women and 25.8% are men; 88% of the subjects are aged between 26 and 55 (the most heavily represented age range is 41-45, a category to which 22% of informants belong). More than half of the teachers (55.2%) have over 10 years’ experience of teaching Spanish and almost 90% have taught Spanish from levels A1 to C1; 68.6% have taught up to level C2. Therefore, in terms of teaching experience, there are no pertinent differences between NS and NNS. In general terms, the sample consists of teachers with many years’ teaching experience at many levels. The university is the most frequent workplace among participants, this being the case for almost 70%, followed by the Instituto Cervantes (13.4%). In other words, the vast majority of respondents teach adults. In this there is a small difference between NS and NNS teachers, as no one from the latter group works at the Instituto Cervantes, although all but one are employed in a university setting.



## 4. Results

### 4.1. Educational profile

On the subject of participants' training about linguistic varieties and teaching them (Q.12 and Q.13) there is no discernible difference between the responses given by NS and NNS, so data are combined. As can be seen below (Figure 1)—note that more than one response could be given to this question—almost half the respondents lacked education in Spanish Dialectology, while 32.8% declared they were self-taught by various means (including reading, research and information obtained from friends and colleagues). Only 13.5% of teachers report receiving specific training on how to teach dialectal varieties in L2/FL classes (Figure 2), although the majority who have not had training state that they would like to attend a course (70.2%). Taking both questions together, it can also be noted that in responses to the first, only 3% consider training in dialectal varieties unnecessary whereas in the second, 12% comment that there is no need for specific training in teaching them.

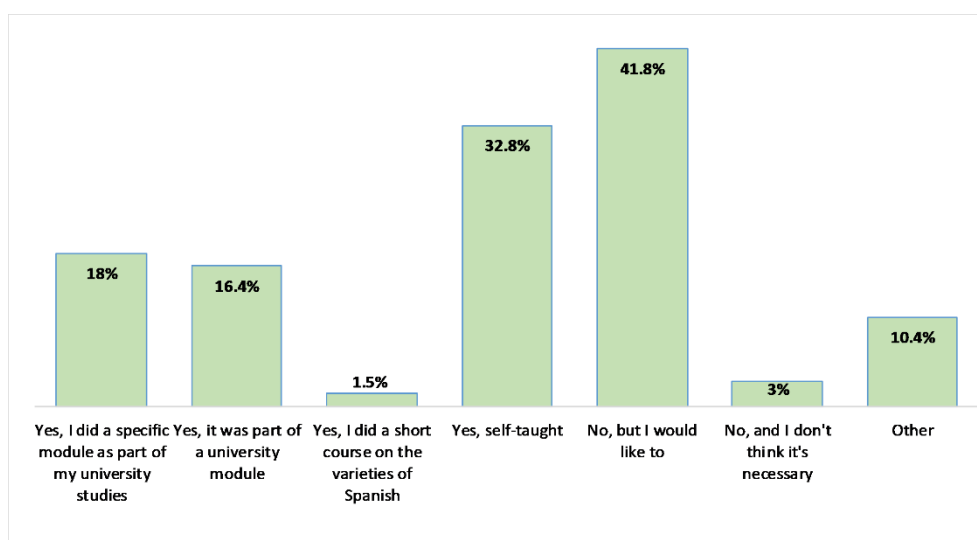


Figure 1. Inclusion of Spanish dialectal varieties in teacher education

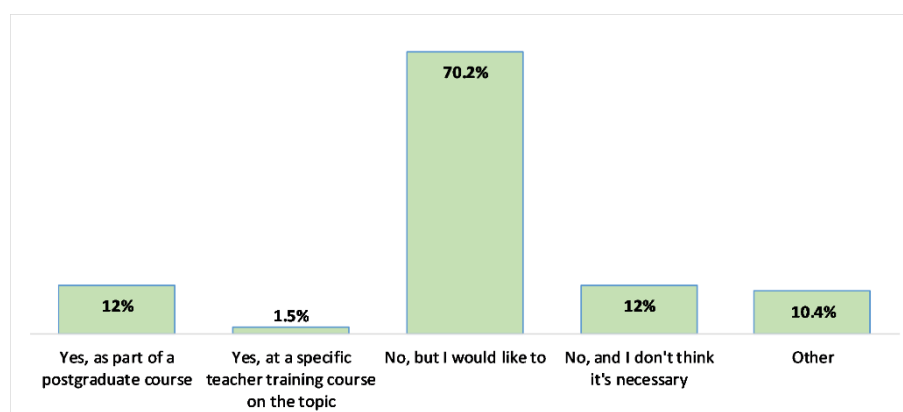


Figure 2. Inclusion of specific training for the teaching of Spanish dialectal varieties in teacher education.

### 4.2. Perception of own variety

In response to the second research question, it should be noted that the majority of participants (79.14%) believe they speak a standard variety, although among speakers whose native language is English, the figure is reduced to a little over half (55.5%). It is also interesting to note that, among the latter, over half speak Peninsular Spanish (55.5%), and interestingly none

of them identified as speaking the southern variety. Likewise, when comparing responses to Q. 9 and Q.10, results yield relevant data on the native speakers of peninsular varieties and their perceptions of their own variety: while 85.71% of speakers of Northern-Central Peninsular Spanish claim to use a standard variety, most speakers of Southern Peninsular Spanish judge their variety to be non-standard (60%). As for the NS from bilingual areas, 64.71% indicate that they consider their variety standard.

Participants provided various justifications as to whether or not they consider the variety of Spanish they speak to be standard (Q.10). Among the most frequent, it is worth highlighting occurrences where specific linguistic features are mentioned, particularly at the phonetic/phonological level. These can either serve to define a variety as standard (P. 43: “no tengo un acento regional específico”) or as non-standard (P. 14: “el andaluz no es una variedad considerada como prestigiosa, ya que en algunas zonas se *sesea* y en otras se *cecea*”). However, references are also made to other levels of linguistic analysis, with intelligibility and clarity cited as factors which contribute to a variety being regarded as standard. In addition, frequent reference is also made to aspects such as commonness, the number of speakers, their location and geographical spread, as well as references to tradition or another criterion suggesting authority such as the use of a particular variety of Spanish in literature, the media, teaching and textbooks.

To a lesser extent, the notion of standard language is also linked with ideas of prestige, as well as terms used explicitly in the questionnaire such as *norm* and *model*. The adjectives *cultivated* and *correct*, on the other hand, are used on very few occasions in connection with the standard. Some respondents claim that all varieties are standard, or even that they do not believe in such a thing. Another significant finding points to the supposed incompatibility between standard language and linguistic contact. Several speakers of Spanish from bilingual areas claim that their variety is not standard because of contact with (or *contamination* by) other languages (P. 30: “el español hablado por los catalanes es hermoso, pero no deja de ser un *patois*”).

### 4.3. Teaching practice

#### 4.3.1. Which varieties to teach

The vast majority of participants reject the idea of teaching a single variety of Spanish to language students and only 12.31% are in favour of delivering a programme limited in this way. There is no distinction here between the responses of NS and NNS ( $\chi^2(3) = 2.34, p = 0.52$ ), in other words, both groups prefer a more diverse approach (Figure 3). However, if a the Northern-Central Peninsular variety was proposed as the model of instruction, 30.77% of NNS participants would accept this unreservedly, compared to 3.7% of NS. This gives rise to a statistically significant difference between the two groups (Fisher’s exact test  $p = 0.035$ ). Nevertheless, overall most of the teachers refuse the idea altogether (Figure 4).

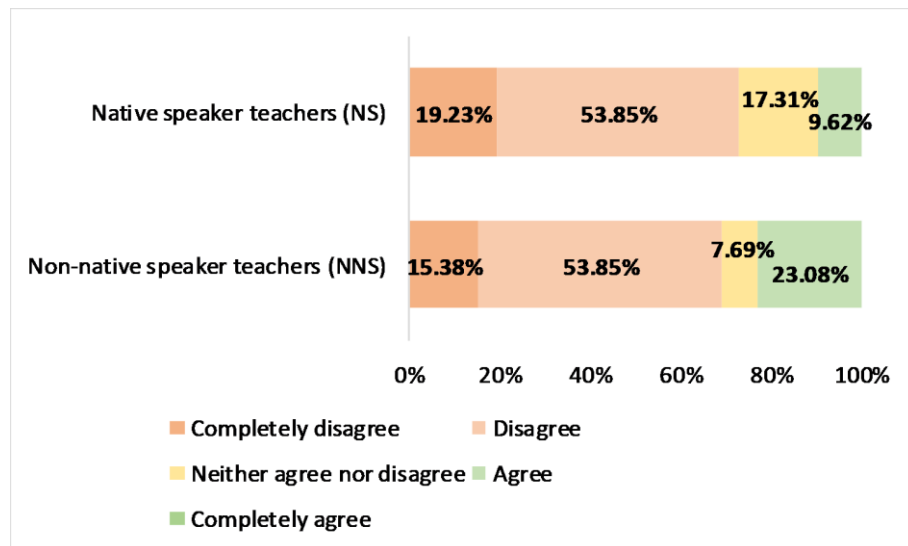


Figure 3 "Teaching a standard variety to foreign students is sufficient."

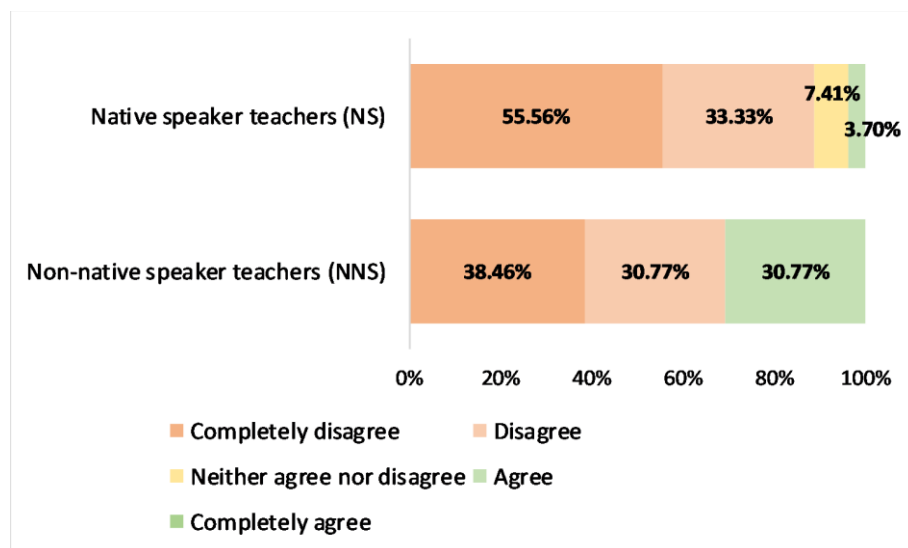


Figure 4 "Teaching the Castilian variety to foreign students is sufficient."

Regarding teachers' opinions about learner preferences, most think students would rather learn a standard variety, although it is worth indicating that 37.31% have no clear view on this (Figure 5). The NS and NNS groups do not differ significantly here (Fisher's exact test  $p = 0.35$ ).

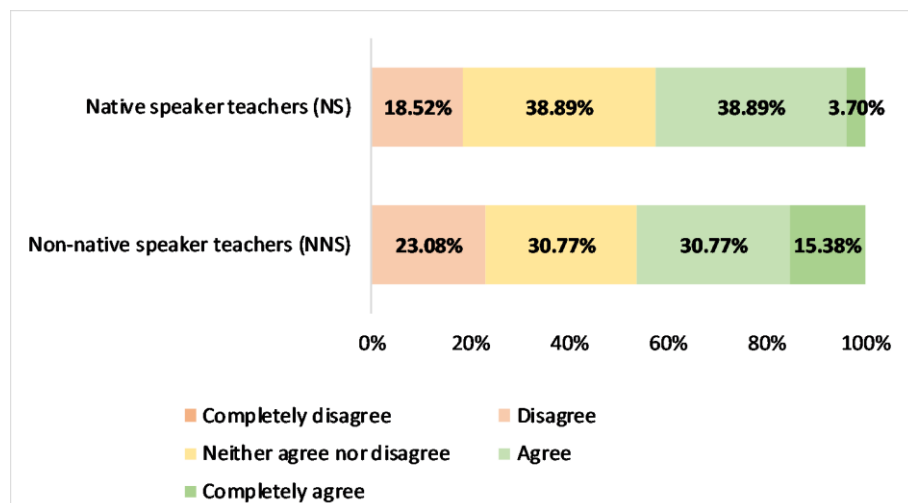


Figure 5 “Foreign students prefer learning a standard variety.”

#### 4.3.2. Varieties that are difficult to teach

Concerning the relative difficulty of teaching particular varieties, the data attested marked differences between teachers’ opinions on the matter: one third state that no one variety is more difficult to teach than any other, one third share the opposing view, and the final third are undecided (Figure 6). The distribution of opinion across NS and NNS groups is similar ( $\chi^2(4) = 1.94, p = 0.75$ ). However, 96% of teachers declare that they would teach all varieties (Q. 17), but not at all levels. The reasons put forward for not teaching certain varieties relate to (i) a lack of confidence and knowledge on the part of the teacher and (ii) the needs, educational context and level of the students.

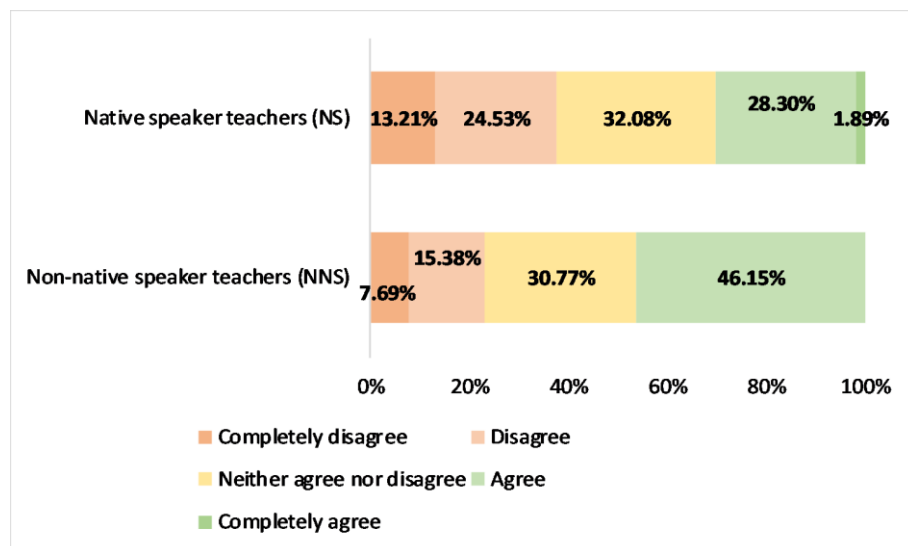


Figure 6 “Some varieties are more difficult to teach.”

The perception of difficulty in learning varieties (Q. 15, Figure 7) differs between the two groups of teachers (Fisher exact test  $p = 0.016$ ): 62.26% of NS think that no variety is harder to learn than any other, while only 33.3% of NNS share that opinion.

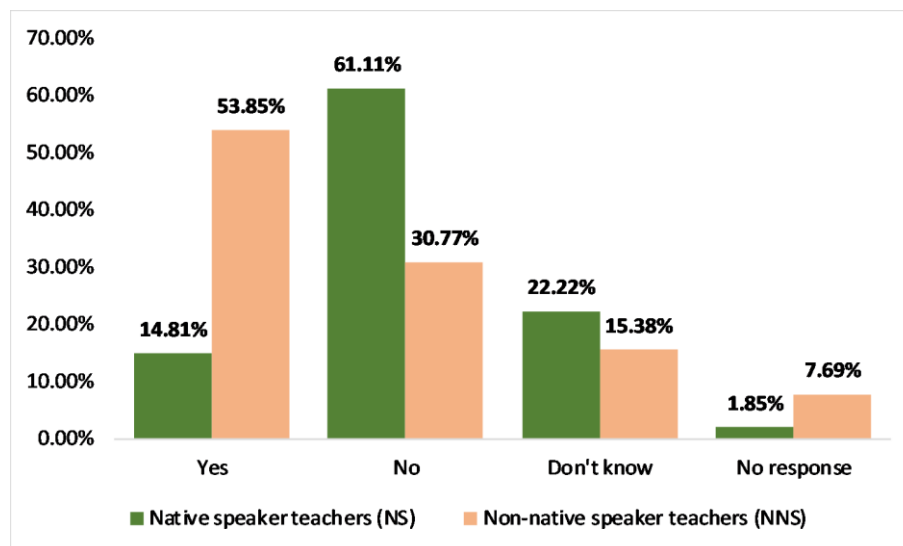


Figure 7 Perception of the difficulties when learning dialects.

The dialects typically considered most challenging are those categorised as belonging to the *terrabajense* cluster: the varieties from the Caribbean, Chile, Argentina, Andalusia and the Canary Islands. The broad thematic concerns that emerge as causes of these difficulties are linked to: (i) the student's level, the teaching context and, in relation to this, (ii) the grammatical, lexical and phonetic/phonological features that are being taught as well as (iii) the influence of the student's mother tongue.

Regarding the consistent use of a single dialectal variety by students, the opinion of NS and NNS is similar (Fisher's exact test  $p = 0.58$ ). A quarter of respondents agree or completely agree that students should show consistency; 40.3% do not have a very clear opinion and the rest of the respondents said they did not agree (Figure 8).

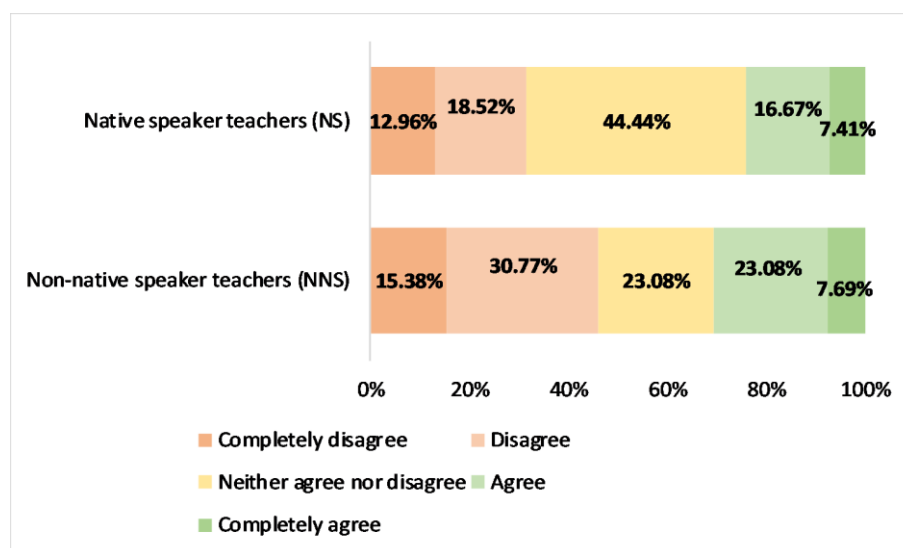


Figure 8 "Foreign students shouldn't mix different dialects."

#### 4.3.3. The teachers' discourse

Almost all the participants declare themselves opposed to teachers modifying their variety of Spanish in the classroom, even if it does not conform to the standard (Figures 9 and 10). Notwithstanding, qualitative data indicate that teachers who speak Southern Peninsular Spanish often do modify features of their speech. It is also interesting to note that NNS are more uncertain than NS about teachers using different varieties of Spanish in the classroom, while it

is NS who appear to have less fixed views about modifying their variety if it does not match the standard. In both groups, over 90% are in favour of the teacher using their own variety and providing examples drawn from others (Figures 9 and 10), although, interestingly, the NS respondents tend to “completely agree” (61.11% compared to the 33.33% who state that they “agree”) while in the NNS group the distribution is reversed (61.54% “agree” and 30.77% “completely agree”). This divergence, however, is not statistically significant.

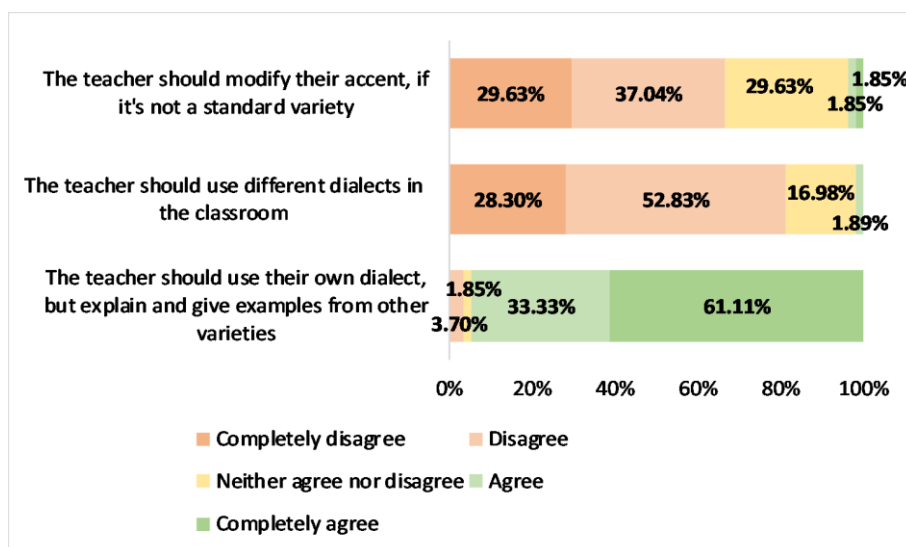


Figure 9 Native teachers' (NS) opinion of teacher discourses.

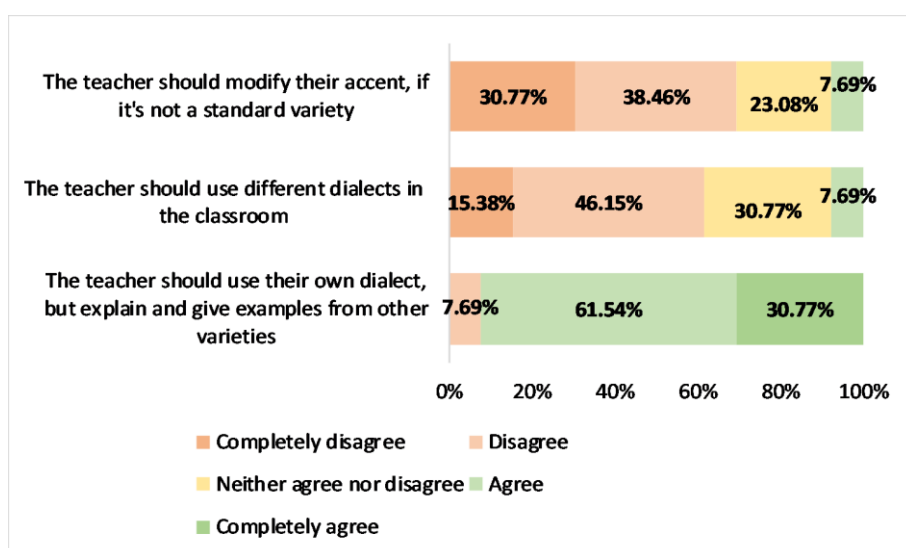


Figure 10 Non-native teachers' (NNS) opinion of teacher discourses.

#### 4.4. Advantages and difficulties

Almost all the teachers consider the inclusion of varieties of Spanish in the L2/FL classroom to be a positive undertaking (Figure 11). Informants point to a number of advantages linked with students' linguistic competence and, in particular, to improvements in communication, interaction and comprehension—especially in auditory skills (the benefit cited most often). Respondents also mention the need to teach varieties that expand students' knowledge about the language and, especially, about dialects, to make them more alert to linguistic richness. In addition, several teachers discuss the potential for *real (life) language* (as opposed to what appears in textbooks) to expand the lexical repertoire and accentuate the value of other extrinsic

characteristics of Spanish, such as its high number of speakers or the homogeneity in its diversity. Studying Spanish dialectal varieties is considered important in increasing the metalinguistic awareness of learners and in developing metacognitive and affective learning strategies. Other advantages relate to the development of intercultural competence. Emphasis is placed on the fact that in studying language varieties, much can be learned about the relationship between language and society and language and culture. In addition, culture can be accessed through language (the study of varieties may serve as a gateway into different literary traditions, music, etc.). In similar vein, geographical variation is considered useful in promoting sensitivity towards difference and cultural diversity and inspiring curiosity about other cultures. Beyond the realm of language, studying dialectal varieties encourages travel and fosters mutual respect. The only aspects cited by participants which temper the advantages of bringing language varieties into the classroom relate to the level at which they should be introduced.

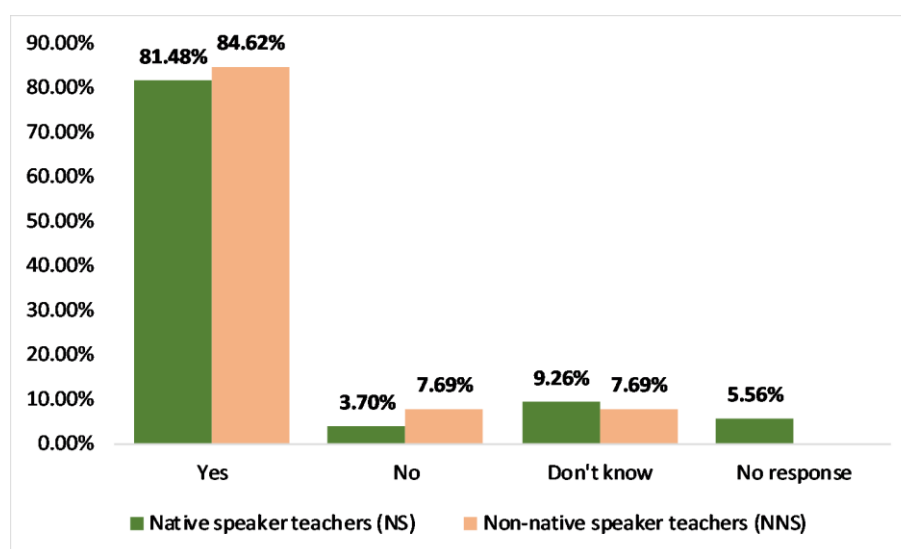


Figure 11. Perception of the advantages of teaching dialectal varieties.

Regarding the potential difficulties associated with teaching varieties, it can be observed that 61.11% of NS teachers identify various drawbacks, a finding that drops slightly to 53.85% in the NNS group (Figure 12) and is accompanied by a rise to 38% of NNS who do not perceive difficulties in incorporating varieties. These drawbacks can be grouped around four main elements: (i) the teacher, whose lack of training is one of the most frequently mentioned drawbacks; (ii) the student, who may experience confusion (also frequently cited) or mix up different varieties, particularly at lower levels; (iii) the methodology, as it is claimed that teaching varieties makes correction difficult; (iv) the educational context, which manifests itself, for example, in the impossibility of adding further content to the existing curriculum.

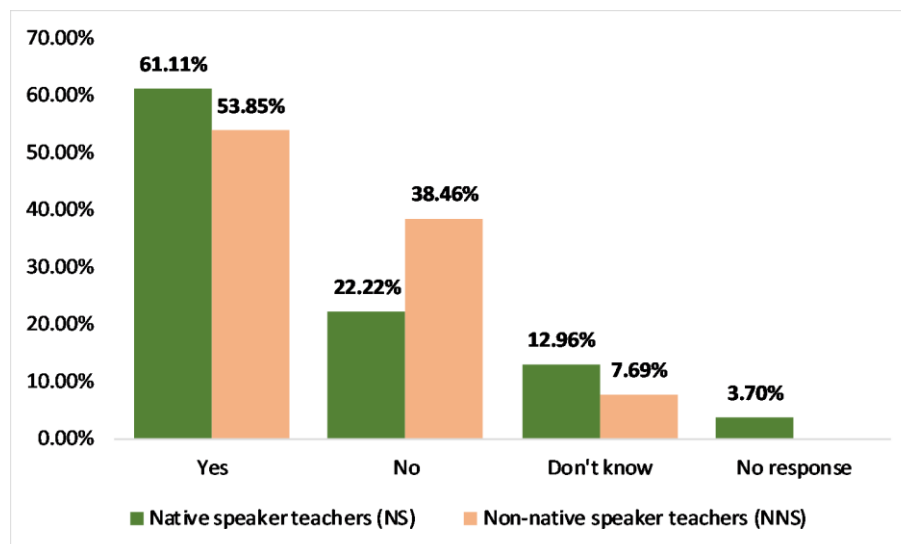


Figure 12. Perception of the difficulties of teaching dialectal varieties.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. *Pluricentricism and Standard Spanish*

When analysing the data as a whole in terms of external linguistic phenomena associated with the notion of a standard variety, the observations can be made of the data: (i) traces of ideas related to a purist conception of language shown, for example, in definitions of the standard that highlight, among its salient characteristics, the absence of influence from other languages or geographical varieties and the association of the standard with the urban; (ii) a certain rejection of the connection between the standard and prestige, which is considered a subjective and, almost always, negative notion linked to stigma and elitism, which contrasts somewhat with the criterion of prestige established in the PCIC to support the choice of its preferred variety; (iii) the association, on the one hand, of the standard with the common, showing a certain affinity with the notions of standard discussed by specialists and, on the other, limited mention of the cultivated or correct, concepts which are also frequently linked to the standard (Moreno Fernández 2010, 41). One of the reasons for this may be the definition of standard provided in the questionnaire itself, which contains the word *common*, rather than *cultivated* or *correct*. Furthermore, in terms of the characterisation of the standard through internal linguistic phenomena, the tendency to describe it by giving examples at the phonetic-phonological level and by mentioning intelligibility coincides with the sort of dialectal features that non-specialist speakers usually identify (Quesada Pacheco 2014, Castro 2015).

Therefore, in relation to the concept of Standard Spanish, heterogeneous tendencies are observed across the sample as a whole, ranging from the defence of opinions linked to positions already left behind by linguistic theories on the one hand, to the denial of the existence of a Standard Spanish on the other. As such, there is a divergence more generally in the positions adopted with regard to suppositions shaping the ideology of standard language.

Another example of this heterogeneity can be seen in respondents' references to tradition and the popular beliefs associated with the prestige of varieties; some are supportive and endorse them, while others oppose. Similarly, it is worth noting that the analysis of participants' discourse reveals the frequent use of linguistic devices that can be interpreted as attempts to distance themselves from particular viewpoints: for example, the passive is often employed when mention is made of the standard (P. 3: “se toma como modelo”), combined with repeated use of the verb *to consider* (P. 20: “se considera una variedad común y prestigiosa”) or attenuation (P. 4: “nos guste o no, es el modelo...” I. 7: “no estoy seguro”).



In addition, participants' discourse generally shows sensitivity towards the pluricentricism of the Spanish norm, discernible, for example, in a rejection of the idea of teaching just one dialectal variety. Nevertheless, in line with Beaven's findings (2000), a certain degree of eclecticism is detected in teaching practices, arising not only from linguistic considerations (too many different models) but also personal ones (lack of training), didactic concerns (complexity can cause confusion), and contextual issues (lack of time).

However, perhaps the most distinctive feature of the teachers' conception of Standard Spanish lies in the frequent connections made between standard language and textbooks or standard language and student preferences, because this reveals the extent to which these views are marked by the identity of the participants and, in this case, their professional identity. Another aspect reflected in the data that is marked to a lesser extent by the composition of the group, is expressed in allusions to conscious and unconscious uses of the language. These include mentions of how teachers adapt and modify their own variety in the classroom context. Also, teachers appear to be aware of commonly-held opinions about the exemplary nature of Northern-Central Peninsular Spanish. To sum up, the pluricentric vision is present among respondents, but its actual application in the classroom, is judged to be limited.

### ***5.2. Native and non-native teachers***

Our results contribute to the growing number of studies that claim it is incongruous to set up comparisons between Spanish L2/FL teachers based on whether they are native or non-native speakers (cf. Thompson and Cuesta Medina 2019, among others), especially in our multicultural, multilingual world. Generally, native and non-native teachers appear to hold very similar opinions concerning the advantages and difficulties in the teaching and learning of dialectal varieties in UK-based L2/FL classrooms.

It is interesting to note that neither NS nor NNS teachers hold strong unanimous views on the need for coherence and consistency in the use of dialectal variety by their students. It should be remembered that this was one of the recommendations linked with the requirement to be consistent when speaking a language that appeared in the first edition of the CEFR (Council of Europe 2001, 118). This criterion is not mentioned in the most recent version (Council of Europe 2018). This indecisiveness may stem from the conflict between aiming to "sound native" in a particular language and the reality of the learner, especially the learner studying the language in a non-immersion context, which is also the reality of the informants of the present study. A student who has native and non-native teachers who speak different dialectal varieties and who spends periods of time in different Spanish-speaking countries cannot be consistent in her language use until, conceivably, she achieves a very high level of competence (at least C1) and acquires an in-depth knowledge of the similarities and differences between dialects, something which, as we have seen, many of the teachers claim to lack. And this is the reality for some NNS teachers too—who are actually just more advanced and more competent students of Spanish than their students—so it is not surprising that several of them state they do not speak any specific variety (P. 88) or that they speak a mixture (P. 86).

In relation to this, in a study on the employability of non-native English teachers, Clark and Paran (2007) show that 72.3% of the British educational institutions surveyed use this criterion when hiring staff. This implies that there may be a bias not only toward a teacher's native or non-native competence, but that a teacher's linguistic variety may also matter. In the case of English teachers in the UK, the privileged variety is British English or as close as possible to so-called received pronunciation (RP). This may partly explain why the British teachers who identify themselves with Peninsular Spanish never opt for the southern variety, since they see the Northern-Central type as the Spanish 'equivalent' of RP. At the same time, the most important difference between NS and NNS teachers is that the latter identify to a

greater extent with a type of Spanish that does not have specific geographical features, which may be a marker of their tendency to teach neutral or international Spanish.

### **5.3. Language varieties in the classroom**

Teachers show they are aware of the diversity of dialectal variation and, in general, they are able to identify both their own and other varieties. This awareness makes for sensitivity to the richness of the language, but can also provoke negative feelings. Findings show that teachers feel the need for more training in the area of dialectal variety and would like much more training in actually teaching varieties. In order to perceive dialectal variation in a genuinely multifocal way and in the terms defined by Moreno Fernández (2012), teachers must be able to distinguish the relative similarities and differences between distinct varieties. This means having in-depth and detailed knowledge of every linguistic level, as well as of the language as a whole. Few teachers possess such knowledge, which provokes feelings of insecurity and discomfort in their teaching. Participants' remarks shed light on uncertainty with regards to what it means to *teach* varieties, since many of the participants declare that the teacher can only teach their own variety, or that varieties cannot be taught, and the teacher should just show or inform students of their existence. The frequent mention of differences in pronunciation between varieties also reinforces this idea, as it is relatively easy to see the differences at this level without having had specific prior training. However, the teaching of pronunciation occupies a marginal or anecdotal position (Mellado 2012), all the more so in teacher training, which reinforces the feeling of lack of knowledge concerning the teaching of varieties.

It is also not unusual for teachers who speak southern varieties to feel the need to distance themselves from their own dialect in the classroom. By *distancing*, they generally mean changing their pronunciation to bring it closer to Northern-Central Peninsular Spanish or the Castilian norm. Here, once again, we can observe the speaker-teacher dichotomy their identity expresses. As speakers, they are aware of the social standing of their variety (or lack of it) and often also of their students' prejudices and this can make them alter their pronunciation for a variety of reasons (student or peer prejudice or the expectations of the employing institution); as teachers, this can cause tension between participants' own views and their behaviour in the classroom.

## **6. Limitations and scope for future research**

The present study has thrown up a series of limitations that may serve as lines of investigation in future research. Firstly, the majority of participants completing the online questionnaire were university professionals. This is linked to the various distribution channels used for sending out the survey. It would be useful for subsequent studies to address the same questions among teachers at other educational levels and in other institutional settings. Secondly, in some cases, there appears to be a lack of clarity in the interpretation of certain concepts, for example, the conception of what constitutes *Standard Spanish*, even though a series of adjectives was provided. Finally, there are still questions that have not been sufficiently well answered and could be addressed in future studies, for example, whether the same results would apply to teachers working in contexts of full immersion or in places where there are few native teachers.

## **7. Conclusion**

The vast majority of teachers of L2/FL Spanish in the United Kingdom are positive about the teaching and learning of Spanish dialectal varieties, although it is striking that a third of them consider the variety they speak to lack prestige. Additionally, many teachers recognize the need to train in both Spanish dialectology and the didactic dimension of linguistic variety and are critical of the lack of teaching materials that allow for exploration of the differences in language use in the Pan-Hispanic context. Although certain prejudices persist and there is some

dependence on traditional opinions that prevent teachers from forming their own views, in general, there is evidence of a pluricentric conception of the Spanish linguistic norm. Moreover, in spite of recognizing the challenges involved, teaching language varieties is considered beneficial for students. Native and non-native teachers largely hold similar opinions about the place of varieties in the classroom. Taking into account the lived reality of the non-native speaker and the rapid growth of Spanish throughout the world, which goes beyond the borders of Spanish-speaking countries, there is a need to integrate linguistic features representative of different varieties so that learners acquire a comprehensive global view of the language. The question also arises whether, in fact, L2/FL students should be taught a global variety of Spanish.

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